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Shoo-Fly at School.

(Continued from Wide Awake Library, No. 281.)



"An ocean," shouted Mr. Thwacker, bringing the ruler down, "is—" There was a sudden explosion that caused him to start back as if shot.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a lively scene after that cake had been cut and tasted.

Nearly all of the eaters were sick, and they slunk away outside to relieve their stomachs. Shoo-Fly was particularly happy.

He sidled up to a fancy nig with a red necktie and a white vest, who had put on an awful lot of frills at the cake-walk.

He was sitting uneasily in one corner, with a shaking body and trembling hands.

Evidently he was wishing that he had never seen the cake, much less ate of it.

"Know whar I kin git any pork?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Oh!" replied the other.

"Some nice greasy pork."

"Ah!" groaned the nig, pressing his stomach with his hands.

"Some fat pork, wid de grease all a dripping from it!" continued Shoo-Fly.

"Please go 'way."

"Or dar's soft clams. Nice, stringy soft clams."

"Yah! I want ter die."

"Oh, doant. Come wid me an' hab some suet puddin' wid ha'r ile sauce."

"Yoop!" gurgled the wretched nig, as he made

a bold dash for the window and emptied the contents of his stomach over a passing Tom-cat, greatly to the latter's surprise.

"Guess he's settled," grinned Shoo-Fly, as he ambled across the room to a darkey belle, also a cake-walker and a cake-eater, who sat with her head done up in a shawl.

"Lubly moon to-night, miss," observed Shoo-Fly.

"Don't keer for de moon," sighed the sick belle.

"De stars am exquisite."

"Doan't keer fo' de stars."

"Dar am a comet ober in de nex' lot."

"Doan't keer if der are fifty. Please go 'way."

"Am you sick?"

"Ise dying."

"Stomach shaking?"

"It's gwine right up an'down."

"Ise sorry for youse. Jess youse gwine an' get a nice lot ob raw iysters wid a Croton-bug fricassee an' kerosene ile!" suggested Shoo-Fly.

This was too much.

"Yoop!" exclaimed the colored lady, and she tottered over the door, and commenced to exhibit all she had ate for the last six weeks to an astonished rooster who had got lost out into the dark.

The episode of the cake-walk furnished talk for a long time for the village.

It bothered Miss Charity awfully, but to the day of her death she never discovered how the cake got full of kerosene-oil. Shoo-Fly never divulged it.

One day Shoo-Fly went to Bridgeport.

He came back with a banjo.

He said he bought it, but it was extremely doubtful, especially as somebody had a banjo stolen that very day.

Shoo-Fly took it out to show Uncle Pete.

Uncle Pete was in the barn, cutting hay for the horses.

"What's dat you got, chile?" asked he, stopping in his work

"Dat yer's an African piano."

"Wha's dat?"

"A banjo."

"Shoo!"

"It's so."

"You ain't got a real largerry banjo. Go 'way—you are lyin'."

"It's de fac'," assured Shoo-Fly, taking the banjo from its case.

Uncle Pete took it tenderly into his hands.

"Golly—it's jess dat," he said, handling it lovingly.

"Gib us a tune," requested Shoo-Fly.

"Dassent," said Uncle Pete.

"Why not?"

"Ise a church-member."

"De banjo doan't keer."

"But I do. I promised de minister not to hab anyting to de wid sich wanities. Kin you play?"

"Jess a leetle."

"Den gib us a song."

Shoo-Fly took a seat on the hay cutter.

"Here goes for de segars," he said, striking a few preliminary cords, and then bursting out with:

"De stars am shining in de sky,
Buy me a golden harp,
Gabriel's horn am up so high,
Buy me a golden harp.
De road am narrow, de gate am small,
De cullurd angels am mighty tall,
An' white trash won't get in at all,
Buy me a golden harp."

Chorus.

Den buy—buy—buy—buy—
Buy me a golden harp;
I've got my wings an' de oder tings,
So buy me a golden harp.

"Dat's wicked," responded Uncle Pete; nevertheless secretly delighted, for the love for a song is inherit in every darkey.

"Tain't; it's a song," grinned Shoo-Fly, changing into a jig.

A broad smile appeared on Uncle Pete's face.

"Stop it," he begged.

"What fo'?"

"It tickles me. Golly, I used to dance it on de ole plantation."

But Shoo-Fly kept right on.

Uncle Pete's feet began to move. A broad grin usurped his face.

"Oh, kill me," exclaimed he, "I'se too sweet to lib. Shoo-Fly, stop dat music."

"Kain't; I'se wound up an' de key am lost."

"Whoa!" bawled Uncle Pete, his feet moving more actively and patting time. "I'se a young moke agin. I'se a daisy. I'se de pet ob de yaller gals. Oh, scratch me wid a briar!"

"All hands around. Swing your partners!" bawled Shoo-Fly, twanging away on the banjo.

"Hit me wid a rosebud—I'se a week-old baby. Ki, smother me wid milk. I feel as good as a kitten!" screeched Uncle Pete, as he flung off his coat and dashed into a regular plantation shuffle.

"Go in," advised Shoo-Fly. "Shake up dem gravel-smashers. Fust ting you know youse'll be getting six cents a week and board yourself wid a variety show."

Uncle Pete was full of enthusiasm.

He hopped about with remarkable spryness for a man of his years, and got putting in fancy steps.

"Clar de kitchen. I'se ain't no slouch if I do have fits!" he panted. "Watch me frow my hoofs."

"Bully fo' de ole man; some mo'," encouraged Shoo-Fly, manipulating the banjo with considerable skill.

Suddenly two shadows appeared in the door.

Two exclamations were uttered.

"Merciful Hebbens!"

"Great Lord!"

Shoo-Fly looked up.

Standing in the doorway were Parson Sweetoil, the shepherd of Uncle Pete's flock, and Sister Pairaces, Uncle Pete's lady-love, both of whom were intensely religious, and considered dancing and singing worldly songs a rank abomination.

Uncle Pete, though, was so engrossed in his break-down that he did not notice them.

"I'se a hopping whale. I'se a cat-fish wif ha'r on my teeth!" he declared. "I'se a winged hoss ob de prairie!"

"He's crazy!" exclaimed the parson, while Sister Pairaces wept in her handkerchief.

Uncle Pete heard the exclamation.

He looked around now.

Then he made a dive into a near-by feed box.

"Kiber me up, Shoo-Fly. I don't want ter lib any longer."

"Such sinful depravity," groaned the parson.

"In one ob his years," said the sister.

"He ain't done nuffin'," defended Shoo-Fly. "What do youse two want 'round heah, anyhow? We ain't got no old clothes to sell."

The pair held up their hands in holy horror.

"Do you know us?" asked the parson.

"No, sah; I'se don't want to."

"I'se Parson Sweetoil."

"I'se doan't keer if yer was Parson Kerosene ile. Jess skip—we don't want no tramps."

"But I want a few words with my misguided brudder."

"Yer brudder got hung long 'go. He ain't 'round heah anywhere. 'Spects youse after de chickens."

"I will come in," said the parson, advancing.

Now Shoo-Fly's parrot was cocked up in the hay-loft taking all the sport in.

He concluded to take a hand at the game.

"Blast their blasted eyes—kill 'em!" he hoarsely shrieked from his perch aloft.

The pastor started back as if a barrier had suddenly risen before him.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"Oh, demnation, give me a razor till I go down and cut their throats!" Poll called.

The parson conjectured at once that some person peculiarly blood-thirsty was concealed up stairs.

He retreated.

"I'll call on my erring brudder some mo' seasonable time," said he.

"Bounce the sucker! Hit him with a beer-glass!" ordered Poll, and the parson retreated in a hurry, while Poll chuckled herself almost into a fit, and issued an instant order for a fabulous amount of crackers.

Presently Uncle Pete came crawling out of the feed box presenting a most pitiful sight.

"Am dey gone?" he asked.

"Slightly," grinned Shoo-Fly.

"I'se a mis'ble sinner, I'se a goner, shuah," wailed Uncle Pete, "I hab yielded to de debil."

"Oh, cheese it! Hab a can-can now?" urged Shoo-Fly, starting off on his banjo again.

"Break dat banjo up," requested Uncle Pete, solemnly.

"Won't youse dance?"

"Neber mo'. Take it out ob my sight, I's a lost nigger."

"Reckon dat youse'll stay lost," retorted Shoo-Fly; "dar ain't nobody keers enough 'bout youse to offer a reward."

"De debil's got me!" Uncle Pete wailed.

"Put him in the fire!" sternly ordered the parrot from above.

Uncle Pete jumped about half a foot.

"What was dat?" asked he.

"Spirts," assured Shoo-Fly.

"Dar ain't none," reassured Uncle Pete, trying to shake off his superstitious fears.

"Give him six months!" called out the parrot, flying down.

Uncle Pete made a grand rush for the bird.

"If I ketches you I'll wring your neck!" he cried.

Poll flew triumphantly up on a beam over his head.

"Ta-ta, I shall strike you with a feather," she chirped.

"Go soak your head, you bald-headed fool."

Uncle Pete moved reluctantly toward the house, full of remorse at being entrapped into a dance.

"Dat Shoo-Fly is N. G.," he muttered. "Allus cutting up some debiltry wid de ole man. 'Spect dat if I ever gets to Hebben he'll come along an' steal my harp."

Shoo-Fly was generally up to some lark or another.

He had a great way of getting even with folks who displeased him, in a style that was not very pleasant to them.

He had one particular enemy that was a nobby, sweet-scented young man down at the village dry-goods store.

His name was Adolphus McGonigal Brown, and he postured for a masher.

He split his hair plump center, wore a white vest all the year around, had the highest collars that could be built, and was a regular "oh, George, I'm too sweet to touch" baby.

He had fired Shoo-Fly out of the store half-a-dozen times for various things, and Shoo-Fly wasn't the sort of a peanut to stand such funny business without a kick.

So it happened that he casually dropped into the store one afternoon.

Quite a crowd was there.

Especially half a dozen silly young girls whom Adolphus flirted with, and imagined to be completely gone on him.

He was in his glory.

"Halloo, Ace of Spades!" he cried, when Shoo-Fly slouched in, "who dealt you out?"

"Halloo, Clammety Clothespins!" politely retorted Shoo-

Fly, "who opened de cage for youse to fly out? Birdie hab a worm?"

"You're too fresh for a nigger," answered Adolphus, savagely, especially as he heard several giggles.

"Youse ain't fresh 'nuff."

"I'll bounce you out of this store, you black imp!"

"Don't; youse might muss dat pretty blonde wig ob yours. Whar did youse get it—in de grab-bag?"

"Shut up! do you hear?"

"Kain't; ain't got no change."

"I'll make you."

"G'way, George; Ise a bad little nig. Ise'll go out and eat moons, and I'll kill youse wif my breaf! Why don't youse get a glass case ober youse, and go sit in de windy wid 'dese monkeys, ten cents a dozen,' onto youse?"

Adolphus jumped over the counter and started to fling Shoo-Fly out bodily, when a burly farmer interfered.

"Leave the little rat alone," said he; "this is a free country."

"Dat ape wouldn't be loose if it wasn't," put in Shoo-Fly.

"I'll make you sick!" threatened Adolphus, raising his yardstick.

"No, you won't," laughed the farmer. "Just you go back behind the counter and cool off. As for you (to Shoo-Fly) put a stop on your tongue for a while."

"Ise'll be as dumb as a pickled iyster," promised Shoo-Fly. "Dar's gwine to be some fun 'round heah pretty soon."

Sure enough there was.

Presently the express messenger came in.

He was lugging a large box carefully done and tied up in brown paper.

"For you, Mr. Brown—one dollar to pay," he said.

"Where is it from?" asked Brown.

"Darien."

"Who from?"

"There's no name on the bill."

"What's in it?"

"Don't suppose that I looked—did you?"

"Birthday present," said Shoo-Fly, who knew that it was Adolphus' birthday. "Mebbe it am diamonds, or a steam yacht."

"Probably it is a birthday present," said Brown, with the air of a man who was accustomed to receiving birthday presents every day in the week, as he handed over his dollar.

Of course the ladies present were all curiosity to discover what the box contained.

"Open it, Mr. Brown," pleaded one of the fair damsels.

Adolphus took out his knife and cut the encompassing strings.

The tearing off of the brown paper discovered a white wrapper and a delicate rose-tinted note.

Adolphus hastily tore it open.

He blushed as he read it.

"Gib it to us loud!" requested Shoo-Fly, who, of course, had pushed himself into the front ranks of the lookers-on.

"Do," requested the ladies, in chorus.

"Really, my modesty forbids, for you know however flattering it may be to—to myself, it is scarcely the proper thing to divulge a young lady's evidently hopeless affection for my humble self, seeing——" rattled off Brown.

"Gib us de rest in a dipper," remarked Shoo-Fly. "Read de note."

Adolphus in reality was dying to do so.

Without further entreaty he began.

The note ran this way:

"DEAR MR. BROWN:—Probably you will wonder at my forwardness in addressing you, but I cannot help it. Your manly heart has overpowered my maiden coyness. Please accept from me a little birthday present. We shall meet

soon. Good-by, ducky darling, with a sweet—sweet kiss, believe me

"Your daisy dumpling,
"MATTIE EDWARDS."

"Oh, yum—yum!" gasped Shoo-Fly, "somebody club the baby. Oh, Mattie, ain't you awful? Open de package."

Adolphus tore off the white paper; a wooden box appeared.

"Guess what it is," he requested.

The guesses flew around lively.

"A gold watch!"

"Sleeve buttons!"

"Pair of flat-irons!"

"New hat!"

"Pistol!"

"Box of perfumery!"

"Potatoes!"

Adolphus determined to satisfy their curiosity.

He pried open the box with his pen-knife.

And then was revealed:

A dead cat!

Not a cat that had secretly died, but a cat that you could tell was not alive by its smell.

"Great Gawd!" cried Adolphus, starting back in horror.

"Dat's a bully old bull-dog present," taunted Shoo-Fly; "de gal ought to send a grave 'long wid it. Shoo! she mus' be awful gone on youse."

"A blasted pwactical joke!" declared Adolphus, holding the box out at arms' length.

Shoo-Fly gave it a tilt that sent the cat flying in the dandy clerk's face.

"Put some of it on your handkerchief," he advised, as he skipped out of the store, with the dead cat hurled by Adolphus whizzing over his head.

Shoo-Fly had put the job up. It was he who had sent the box to Adolphus—only a white friend, a gay college boy, had written the note for him.

There was a big fall of snow next day.

Shoo-Fly and a lot of little niggers who looked up to him as a sort of leader, were out snowballing.

They were having a grand time.

Presently Shoo-Fly discovered a couple of tramps—male and female—coming up the street.

This was great graft.

"Get behind de corner, boys, and gib it to dem when dey come 'ronnd," he ordered.

The boys obeyed.

They crouched in the shadow of a building, and waited expectantly.

As luck would have it, Uncle Pete with Widow Pairaces were calling at a house just around the corner.

He and the widow came out of the door just ahead of the tramps.

Shoo-Fly saw their shadows coming around the corner.

He mistook them for the tramps.

"Here de come, boys," he shouted. "When I say 'snow-ball dem,' guv it to dem hot an' heaby fo' der New Year's!"

CHAPTER II.

AROUND the corner came Uncle Pete and the Widow Pairaces.

They were conversing lovingly about some party which was to come off soon, when the intention was to present Parson Sweetoil with a pair of embroidered slippers from his loving flock.

"Dey am grand," said Sister Pairaces.

"Dat so?" asked Uncle Pete.

"De dead trufe. Dere am a pair ob red parrots a singing on a fence rail wid a leetle yaller dog looking up at dem."

"Dat am bery voluptuous. Bery am——"

Just then they arrived at the fatal corner.

Shoo-Fly was ready.

"Gib it to de tramps!" he yelled.

A perfect volley of snow-balls saluted the pair.

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Uncle Pete, staggering back.

"Hit dem agin—dey's got no frens!" bawled Shoo-Fly.

The little nigs responded nobly.

A second volley rattled over Uncle Pete and crushed his fair companion's bonnet out of shape.

"Help—help!" cried she.

"Aren't wese helping youse?" Shoo-Fly asked, gently dislocating her false teeth with a regular "soaker" of a snow-ball.

"I'll murder de whole ob youse," threatened Uncle Pete, dodging a couple of hot ones.

"Print it on a pie plate," answered Shoo-Fly. "Youse dog-goned tramps am putting on too much airs."

"Who's a tramp?" asked Uncle Pete, doubling up immediately afterwards from a slug in the stomach.

As for Sister Pairaces, she was in a dilemma.

"Fire! help! police!" she shouted.

"Somebody wash de ole chromo's face and shut up her mouf," requested Shoo-Fly.

An adventurous nig by the name of Cotton tried to do it.

He came up about to the sister's knee, but he was plucky enough to make a very bad pirate.

But his enemy had an umbrella. A big cotton umbrella—emphatically the weapon of the colored sisterhood.

She brought it down with a thump that made Cotton's skull see stars, and upset him, head first, in a snow-drift.

"Get up, Pete!" cried she, elated with her triumph.

"Clar de yearth ob all dese young debils."

Another flood of snow-balls upset both her and Uncle Pete.

Uncle Pete tipped his hat back. The movement disclosed his full face.

Shoo-Fly caught a glance of the familiar countenance and dropped a hard-pressed snowball, containing a marble, a small stick and several pebbles, in consternation.

"Cheese it!" he yelled, skedaddling off.

The rest followed his example, except one unfortunate coon who got caught by Sister Pairaces, and had his ears nearly boxed off.

"Wha's de matter, Shoo-Fly?" asked Cotton, who had got up and headed the retreat.

Shoo-Fly grinned all over.

"Who do youse s'pose dey was?" he queried.

"Who was who?"

"De ole liver-lips dat we snow-balled."

"Two tramps."

"No, sah."

"Den who?"

"Uncle Pete and Widow Pairaces."

"G'way!"

"I'se a telling it with directness. Golly, what a beef-steak!"

All of the crowd had a jolly good laugh.

Meanwhile the two victims were disconsolately arranging their toilets, and brushing the snow off of themselves.

"Did youse eber see such audacity?" groaned Sister Pairaces.

"Neber," sighed Uncle Pete. "Heah am my best black vest, dat ole Massa Ike gib me when he died twenty yeah ago, all bust up."

"Who was dey?"

"Niggers."

"What niggers?"

"I'm almost suah dat I recognized dat yere Shoo-Fly."

"Dat boy is borned to get hung."

"Is'll hang him up 'gainst de wall wid a rope, and paralyze him wid a good cat-ob-nine-tails," threatened Uncle Pete. "Ise gwine right home to find out if it were he."

Uncle Pete did go.

Shoo-Fly, by a rapid transit on the runner of a sleigh, a

cut-behind on a wagon, and a dash through a field, had got there before him.

And Shoo-Fly was sitting by the cosy wood-fire in the kitchen, apparently studying his Sunday-school lesson.

"Moses fit de faro bank—Moses fit de faro bank," he repeated, in a sort of sing-song way.

"Wha's dat?" demanded Uncle Pete.

"Joseph had a coat ob many colors, hit it on de back wid an ole baked cruller," went on Shoo-Fly.

"Whoa dar, chile!" ordered Uncle Pete.

"Daniel in de bullrushes wid a golden calf—felled in de ditch an' all the niggers laff!" Shoo-Fly repeated, seemingly from the book before him.

"Shoo-Fly," solemnly said Uncle Pete, "dat ain't right."

"Know it 'taint—it's de book."

"No 'scuses. Shoo-Fly, Ise has a word fo' you."

"Spit it out."

"It am a berry particular word."

"Den why don't youse put red ribbons on it, an' bring it in on wheels?"

"No tomfoolery. I want youse to speak de trufe."

"I allus does."

"In a horn. Shoo-Fly, listen to me."

"I is."

"Did youse 'sault me wid snow balls?"

Shoo-Fly's face could not have expressed more astonishment if a winged whale had suddenly flown into the room.

"Did I do what?" exclaimed he.

"Did youse 'sault me an' de Widow Pairaces wid snowballs?"

"Is dar snow outside?" innocently asked Shoo-Fly.

"Ob course. Now doan't youse play simple. Was it you dat fired de snowballs?"

"Nebber set fire to no snowballs. Dey won't burn."

"Dat ain't de question."

"Oh, did somebody snowball youse, Uncle Pete?"

"Dey did."

"Who be it?"

"Dat's jess what Ise want to find out. Was it you?"

Shoo-Fly perceived that Uncle Pete was not certain as to his identity.

So he put on a look of gilded and high-toned guilelessness.

"I's been in dis yer kitchen all de morning," declared he, "studyin' ob de Sunday-school lesson. Jess tell me who it was dat snowballed youse, an' I'll bust dere gall fo' dem, shuah. I's wicked to de heel, Uncle Pete."

"Shuah it wasn't you?"

"Shuah, cross my heart; hope to die; take my oath on a bean bag."

Uncle Pete was fain to believe him; he had no positive proof to the contrary.

He left the room without another word.

Shoo-Fly grinned all over with his characteristic, copy-righted grin, as he heard the door shut.

"Dat was spreadin' ob de taffy on wid a shovel," he said, throwing his lesson-book away across the room, and doing a sort of dissipated double-shuffle.

A few days after the incident above narrated, Shoo-Fly got himself into another scrape.

A travelling showman, named Perrywinke, came along with a panorama.

It was a moral and religious panorama, he said, pre-eminently adapted to Sabbath-school exhibitions, church fairs, and entertainments of a highly virtuous class generally.

So the Methodist Sunday-school hired him to give it at a gathering in their church lecture-room.

The deacon was a prime mover in the enterprise, and on the night of the exhibition Mr. Perrywinkle took supper with him.

The dialogue turned on the forthcoming exhibition.

"It would go much better with music," suggested Mr. Perrywinkle.

"How?" asked the deacon.

"Soft music, suggestively tender. For instance, I have one view of the River Jordan. An unseen player behind the panorama might play: 'Roll, Jordan, Roll,' and softly sing it; the effect is immense."

The idea struck the deacon very favorably.

"There ain't any piano in the room, though," he demurred.

"Nor a melodeon?"

"No."

"Nor a parlor organ?"

"No."

Mr. Perrywinkle frowned.

"Then we will have to give the idea up," said he.

"We might get Shoo-Fly and his banjo," suggested the deacon, with a laugh.

"Who is Shoo-Fly?" asked Mr. Perrywinkle.

The deacon explained.

"Can he play good?"

"Excellently."

"And sing?"

"Like a bird. I reckon he knows about three hundred tunes."

"The very thing," exclaimed Mr. Perrywinkle, enthusiastically.

"What, a banjo in a church?" horrifiedly asked the deacon.

"In a good cause—in a good cause, my dear sir," replied Mr. Perrywinkle. "Down at Diamond Hill church we had a bass drum and a tamborine, and nobody objected."

"Well," hesitated the deacon, "if it's all right?"

"Most assuredly, sir. Call in Shoo-Fly."

Shoo-Fly was called in from a vigorous attack on pork and beans in the kitchen.

He was told what was wanted of him.

"Can you do it?" asked Mr. Perrywinkle.

"Dead shuah. I'se boss ob de banjo and a gold medal vocalist," replied Shoo-Fly. "Jess youse gib me the proper steer, an' I'se'll jess be de holiest ting about de show."

Mr. Perrywinkle took Shoo-Fly down to the church.

And he gave him a private rehearsal of the panorama with the music cues and so forth.

"When you see my allegorical picture of Paradise, play the 'Sweet By-and-by.' When you see my painting of Paul, start up, 'Only an Armor Bearer,' etc., etc."

Shoo-Fly faithfully promised.

At last it came time for the exhibition to come off.

The room was crowded with the first families of the village.

Shoo-Fly sat ready with his banjo behind the panorama.

Mr. Perrywinkle went out front, delivered a brief rhetorical flight relative to the extreme sanctity and moral goodness of the panorama.

Then he stepped behind and shoved in the first picture:

"Jerusalem."

Shoo-Fly played a brief overture and softly sang:

"Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest,
Beneath thy contemplation,
Sinks heart and voice oppressed."

The effect was fine and the audience heartily applauded.

Mr. Perrywinkle was delighted.

He rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to hire the little nig altogether to have with the panorama," he said.

Everything went well for a time.

Mr. Perrywinkle concluded to take a short absence "to see a man."

He left the panorama in charge of an assistant named "old Jake."

Old Jake was as deaf as a post, and couldn't hear a cannon a yard off.

He knew how to run the panorama, and that was about all that he did know.

Shoo-Fly by this time was becoming rather mixed.

His memory, never particularly retentive, had forgotten the songs for the different pictures.

Old Jake pushed on the picture of a knock-kneed young man in a pink ulster and no trousers, rambling towards a blue house in whose door stood something that looked like an educated pig extending his front paws.

But it wasn't.

The pink ulster young man was the "Prodigal Son," and the educated pig was supposed by popular courtesy to be his father.

"Prodigal Son!" growled old Jake, as a cue for Shoo-Fly.

"Dog-gone me if I'se ain't gone an' forgot de propah chune," muttered Shoo-Fly, scratching his wool.

"Music!" called an impatient voice from the audience.

In desperation, Shoo-Fly struck up:

"When Johnny comes marching home again,

Hurrah—hurrah!

We'll give him a hearty welcome then,

Hurrah—hurrah!

De ole church bells will ring with joy,

To welcome home our darling boy;

And we'll all get blind drunk,

Johnny, fill up the bowl."

There was some applause, several exclamations of astonishment, and one subdued hiss from the front.

Everybody wore a look of astonishment on their faces.

Old Jake, though, imagined that it was all right.

He yanked on a painting of "Moses."

Off started Shoo-Fly with:

"Whoa, Moses! oh, Moses,

Dere goes the sheeney

Vot sells de ole clotheses;

Whoa, Moses! oh, Moses,

Dat's vot dey holler wherever I go."

The deacon, who was sitting in front, got red in the face.

"That Shoo-Fly must be crazy or drunk," he uneasily muttered; "where is that Perrywinkle? By Gosh, this is rough."

Old Jake next obtruded a chromo of "Daniel in the Lion's Den."

"He comes rolling home in the morning,

Gives the door the devil's own bang,

An' me heart is broke, God knows it is,

Since Terry joined the gang,"

sang Shoo-Fly, blithe as any lark.

"It's a shame!"

"Put him out!"

"It's an outrage!"

"Who is it singing?"

These and other audible cries of shocked surprise were heard all over the hall.

The deacon grabbed his hat.

"I'll go behind that panorama in a minute and hister Shoo-Fly," said the deacon. "Where is Perrywinkle?"

Just then Perrywinkle came into the hall, and scrambled down to the deacon's side.

"Big success—ain't it?" he said.

"It's a thundering shame, by gol!" replied the deacon.

"Why?"

"Shoo-Fly's raising Old Ned."

"How?"

"He's singing all sorts of slang songs."

"Impossible," gasped Perrywinkle.

"Just you listen."

A kerosene oil painting of Martha Washington appeared in sight.

Shoo-Fly's banjo was heard, and immediately after Shoo-Fly's voice, singing:

"She's a darling, she's a daisy,

She's a dumpling, she's a squash;

You should hear her play on the pi-an-a,

Such an education has our Marth Wash!"

Perrywinkle made one bound onto the stage.

He nearly knocked down old Jake in his haste.

"You young devil!" he shouted, grabbing Shoo-Fly by the wool, "what do you mean?"

"Wha's de mattah?" ejaculated Shoo-Fly.

"You've spoiled the whole panorama."

"'Tain't good 'nuff to spile."

Without another word Perrywinkle dragged Shoo-Fly to the back door and kicked him out.

"Dar!" exclaimed Shoo-Fly, ruefully, as he picked himself up, "I'se a heathen from dis day. Dat's what youse get fo' assistin' ob de chu'ch along!"

CHAPTER III.

ONE day the deacon discovered that there was not enough work for Shoo-Fly about the house to fully employ his time.

And as Shoo-Fly idle was invariably a nuisance, the question arose as to what should be done with him.

The deacon cogitated over it.

"What shall I do with Shoo-Fly, Uncle Pete?" he asked.

"Kill him," replied Uncle Pete, without a moment's hesitation. "He am de wust young debil dat ebber I knew."

"I shall send him to school," at last determined the deacon.

"De good Laud pity de school," peevishly exclaimed Uncle Pete, with a shake of his head.

Shoo-Fly was called.

He was informed that on the next day he should go to school.

He didn't care.

He announced his perfect willingness to go anywhere.

The next day he went.

The village school was in session when he arrived outside.

Mr. Thwacker, the teacher, had just got up to give out the morning hymn, when a brick flew through the window and landed clean ker-flump on his desk.

He sprang back with great agility for his age.

"Who done that?" he asked.

He had hardly got the word out of his mouth when a big boy with a big head, a big watch chain and big clothes, uttered a yell as if a Comanche Indian had suddenly scalped him.

"Oh, my!" he shouted.

"What ails you, Stevie?" asked Mr. Thwacker; for Steven was the son of the richest man in the village, and, consequently, was the master's favorite.

"Ow—ouch!" bawled Stevie, "somebody struck me."

"Somebody struck you?"

"Yes, sir."

"What with?"

"A snow-ball. They opened the door and fired it in. Oh, I want to go home—it's all down my neck, and I know I shall catch the croup."

"Did any scholar see who it was that hit Stevie?" asked Mr. Thwacker.

"Yes, sir," chorused half a dozen.

"Who was it?"

"Shoo-Fly, sir."

Now the teacher was not on personal terms with Shoo-Fly.

"Who's Shoo-Fly?" asked he.

"Deacon Hoyt's little nigger," replied half a dozen.
Just here another interruption occurred.

A boy came pitching through the door as if he had been shot out of a cannon.

He rolled over on the floor; upset a bench of little girls, and was finally picked up with great difficulty.

There was a beautiful ring of black around the boy's eye, and his head and the upper part of his body was dripping wet.

Mr. Thwacker dragged him up by the collar.

"Ezra Dobbs," said he, "what do you mean by coming in in such a disgraceful style?"

"T'ain't my fault," glared Ezra, defiantly.

"Whose is it?"

"Shoo-Fly. I'll get our hired man to kill him."

"What did he do?"

"He was outside," sniveled Ezra, "a swimming of a cat in the water-pail. I told him to stop, and he up and blackened my eye and dumped me in the water-pail."

Mr. Thwacker grasped his ruler, and started out of the door.

Evidently Shoo-Fly had expected an expedition of this sort, for no sooner had the door closed before the window opened, and Shoo-Fly made his entrance.

He gained a front seat by the simple expedient of threatening to cut the head off of the boy who occupied it, if said boy did not instantly vacate.

Therefore, when Mr. Thwacker re-entered, Shoo-Fly was one of the first objects that greeted his gaze.

"Did you throw that brick?" sternly asked Mr. Thwacker.

"Was dar a brick frowed?" innocently asked Shoo-Fly.

"Yes, sir."

"Sho! wondah who done it? Did it hurt de brick much?"

"That is not the question. Did you do it?"

"Nebber seed de brick, sah."

Mr. Thwacker determined to try another tack.

"What made you hit Steve Reynolds with the snow-ball?" he asked.

"What snowball?" asked Shoo-Fly, in return.

"Did you throw it?"

"My right arm par'lyzed. I kain't throw wid de left, kin I?"

"You did, nevertheless."

"Youse kain't prove it," said Shoo-Fly, cunningly.

Mr. Thwacker couldn't.

So he went for Shoo-Fly upon the assault and attempted drowning of Ezra Dobbs.

Shoo-Fly acknowledged the offense.

"Dat yer boy come along and he called out:

"Nigger—nigger neber die,
Black face and chiney eye,"

and," went on Shoo-Fly, "I'se up and biffed him. If ole Moses hisself should come along in a golden chariot wid angel wings on de back an' say dat I'd bust up de whole turnout, shuah! I'se a bad, die-in-a-cellar-nigger dat way."

Mr. Thwacker owned that Shoo-Fly had received provocation.

"But what made you swim the cat in the water pail?" he queried.

"'Twasn't a cat," said Shoo-Fly.

"'Twas," interrupted Ezra Dobbs.

"Kin I jess black dat boy's oder eye, so dat dey both will match?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"No," replied Mr. Thwacker; "if it wasn't a cat that you were swimming in the pail, what was it?"

"Kitten," solemnly acknowledged Shoo-Fly; "it hadn't growed up to be a cat yet."

A general giggle ran around the school, and Mr.

Thwacker ordered Shoo-Fly to sit down till the opening exercises were over.

Shoo-Fly obeyed.

A hymn was sung, and then every scholar repeated a verse of some scriptural or moral character.

All had essayed one, when Shoo-Fly arose.

"I know a verse," said he.

"Repeat it," said Mr. Thwacker.

"How doth the little crocodile,
Improve each shining minute,
An' scratch his head de whole day long,
Because dere's millions in it,"

bawled out Shoo-Fly at the top of his voice.

Mr. Thwacker with difficulty smothered a laugh, and called Shoo-Fly up to his desk.

"Ever been to school before?" he asked.

"Been in de jail," was Shoo-Fly's ready answer.

"What do you know?"

"I'se come to de skule to find out."

Mr. Thwacker pulled up a history.

"Who discovered America?" he exclaimed.

"Moses?"

"Who invaded England?"

"Daniel in the Lion's Den."

"Who was Joan of Arc?"

"Spects she didn't lib in our block," answered Shoo-Fly, scratching his wool.

"Your history does not amount to much," smiled Mr. Thwacker. "Spell cow."

"B-u-ll-cow."

"Spell horse."

"N-a-g-horse."

"Your spelling is as bad as your history. Take the book, and sit down in the corner studying this spelling lesson."

Shoo-Fly took the book and retreated to a stool in the corner.

It was a most remarkable thing, but he had not been there five minutes before a spelling-class in front of him sat down in their seats.

They arose, however, with phenomenal alacrity and earnest yells.

"Somebody," wailed the head boy, "stuck pins in the bench."

"Who did it?"

"Shoo-Fly!" cried out a white-headed little girl.

"B-a-t—codfish, b-a-g—whale, b-a-r—church, b-u-g elephant," spelled Shoo-Fly to himself, rocking away in his seat, apparently engrossed in his lesson to the exclusion of everything else.

"Come here, Shoo-Fly," invited Mr. Thwacker.

Shoo-Fly went.

"Hold out your hand."

Shoo-Fly did, and the ruler descended with a "thwack." Mr. Thwacker was justly named.

Shoo-Fly went back to his seat in a swaggering manner. Presently a terrific uproar arose from the white-headed little girl who had told on him.

She arose up with her white head blackened, and rivulets of ink slowly trickling down her face.

"Who did that?" sternly demanded Mr. Thwacker.

"Shoo-Fly," came the response.

"Did you pour ink on that little girl's head?" Mr. Thwacker said.

"Rather 'spect so, sah."

"What made you do it?"

"Jess wanted ter make a brunette out ob her, sah. I does allus hate to see a gal wid hair jess like a chicken's," excused Shoo-Fly. "Dat yere gal's folks will be proud ob her when she goes home lookin' 'spectable."

But Mr. Thwacker did not accept the ingenious explanation.

Instead, Shoo-Fly got a second visitation from the ruler.

"Dar ain't a bit ob fun in dis ole school," he growled, retreating to his seat. "Reckon dat I'll git some gun-powder an' blow de whole ting up."

Shoo-Fly went home at the noon recess.

He brought his parrot back to school with him.

Not openly, but concealed under his coat.

Arriving at the school Shoo-Fly took out the bird, and while the other scholars were not looking, hid it beneath his feet.

As luck willed it Doctor Zeruble appeared that day.

Doctor Zeruble was a great man on a penny scale. He had a large house, considerable money, was chairman of the school board, and lorded it over almost everybody, as the big man of a country town is apt to do.

Mr. Thwacker received the doctor with great obsequiousness.

"Won't you make a few remarks?" he asked.

The doctor complied.

He was a regular slouch of a speaker, but he didn't know it.

He had a delusion that he could hold multitudes spell-bound by the magic of his eloquence.

"Dear boys and girls," he began, "I did not really expect to speak before you this afternoon."

"Oh, shut up!" squeaked Shoo-Fly's parrot, incited by its malicious master.

The doctor paused in consternation. "Who spoke?" he demanded.

"Charley Molasses!" squeaked the parrot again.

"Charles Molasses, stand up," ordered the doctor severely.

"There isn't any Charles Molasses in the school," faltered Mr. Thwacker.

"Who said that there was?" asked the doctor.

"Billy Mud!" responded the parrot.

"William Mud, arise!" thundered the doctor.

Nobody stirred.

"There isn't any William Mud in the school, either," said Mr. Thwacker, almost trembling.

"This is most remarkable," said the doctor, glaring about. "Some scholar is trying to perpetrate a practical joke; some scholar will be severely——"

"Put the rest on the next load!" commanded the parrot.

"Who spoke?" roared the doctor.

"Take a day off and find out," replied the parrot.

"Who was it?"

"Nancy Lee—Daniel in the lions' den. Whoop, set 'em up for the boys. Double six, you sucker," rattled off the parrot.

The doctor got red with rage.

"Mr. Thwacker," he said, "this is a nice way to conduct a school."

"I'm sure I don't know who is talking," excused Mr. Thwacker.

"You should find out sir," said the doctor. "You should——"

"Spit on a towel and take a bath," interrupted the parrot. "Glory Hallelujah! Zwi beer—grip the graft," howled that noble bird of Shoo-Fly's.

The doctor grasped his cane and put on his hat.

"I won't stay to be insulted. Mr. Thwacker, you will regret this, sir," he said, going out.

And as he passed the door the parrot sweetly cried:

"Over the sewer, baby. Pull down your socks and don't get your feet wet!"

After his departure Mr. Thwacker called the school to order.

"I will give a bright gold dollar to anyone who can tell me who caused all this disorder," he promised.

As if endowed with powers of understanding, the parrot wriggled away from Shoo-Fly, crept under the benches to the school-master's desk, and cocking its head saucily to one side, looked up at him and chirped:

"I'll take the pot!"

A roar of laughter went up from the school. In a moment Mr. Thwacker saw the cause of the unpleasantness.

"Whose parrot is it?" asked he.

"Shoo-Fly's," responded the same old chorus.

Shoo-Fly, of course, was immediately waltzed up to the desk again.

And he and the ruler met for the third time. After which he was sent home with the polite intimation that the society of parrots was not wished for in that school.

Now Shoo-Fly didn't like these fights with the ruler.

Neither was he mashed on Mr. Thwacker.

He resolved to get square upon the latter.

Somewhere or other he procured a torpedo. Not one of those little innocent torpedoes which come five cents a pack, but a kind now prohibited by law, but very popular some years ago, called "The Union Torpedo."

He took it to school with him the next day.

Mr. Thwacker had a habit, when elucidating any truth, of bringing his ruler down with a thump onto his desk.

Whether by habit or design he almost invariably struck the same spot.

Shoo-Fly was aware of this.

While Mr. Thwacker was out to lunch, Shoo-Fly cut the baize covering on his desk, dug away the wood beneath it, inserted the torpedo and carefully replaced the baize so that not a particular observer could detect the tampering.

Pretty soon Mr. Thwacker came back.

He called the school to order and raked up the geography class.

"Shoo-Fly," he asked, "what is an ocean?"

"A body of land entirely surrounded by water," howled Shoo-Fly.

"Put on the dunce cap," ordered Mr. Thwacker, "and go stand up on the stool. Your head is principally composed of mortar."

"What is an ocean, anyway?" asked Shoo-Fly, getting up onto the stool.

"An ocean," shouted Mr. Thwacker, bringing the ruler down, "is——" There was a sudden explosion that caused him to start back as if shot!

CHAPTER IV.

MR THWACKER could not have been more surprised if a two-headed crane had emerged from the floor and commenced a song and dance.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, dazedly watching the smoke clear away from the top of his desk. "What was that?"

"Somethin' bust," informed Shoo-Fly, with a remarkably sober face.

"It was de top of de desk," said a second frightened darkey, who had dove down under the benches in a spasm of fear.

"Lemme go fo' de fire bullgine?" requested Shoo-Fly.

"Stay where you are," sternly ordered Mr. Thwacker.

"This must be investigated."

He examined the top of his desk.

The marks of the explosion were plainly visible in the shape of burnt bits of leather, charred splinters and particles of the torpedo.

"Somebody put a torpedo onto my desk," answered Mr. Thwacker.

"Good Lawd!" exclaimed Shoo-Fly, with an assumption of intense surprise; "it am a dog-doned wonder dat we ain't all stiffies."

"Will you be still?" asked Mr. Thwacker. "Who did it?"

"Billy Fisher," promptly answered Shoo-Fly.

"William Fisher," called out Mr. Thwacker.

In response, a little nigger, with a head of wool like a disturbed mattress, got up and rolled his eyes indignantly at our hero.

"Please, thir," he lisped to Mr. Thwacker, "Billy Fisher done gone an' died de week afo' last."

"What do you mean by such a lie?" indignantly asked Mr. Thwacker of our hero.

"S'pect he done it afo' he died," responded Shoo-Fly.

"Do you know so?"

"Only s'pect so."

"Then why do you say so?"

"Jess like dat ar' Billy Fisher for to go an' do some-
thin', an' then try to get rid ob de consequences."

"Scholars," asked Mr. Thwacker, disregarding this plausible explanation, "I have been the victim of a pusilanimous——"

"Dey don't hab to tie a tail on dat word when it gets

one of you has played me a practical joke of a mean nature. It was the act of a coward."

"Dat's de bressed trufe," emphatically assented Shoo-Fly.

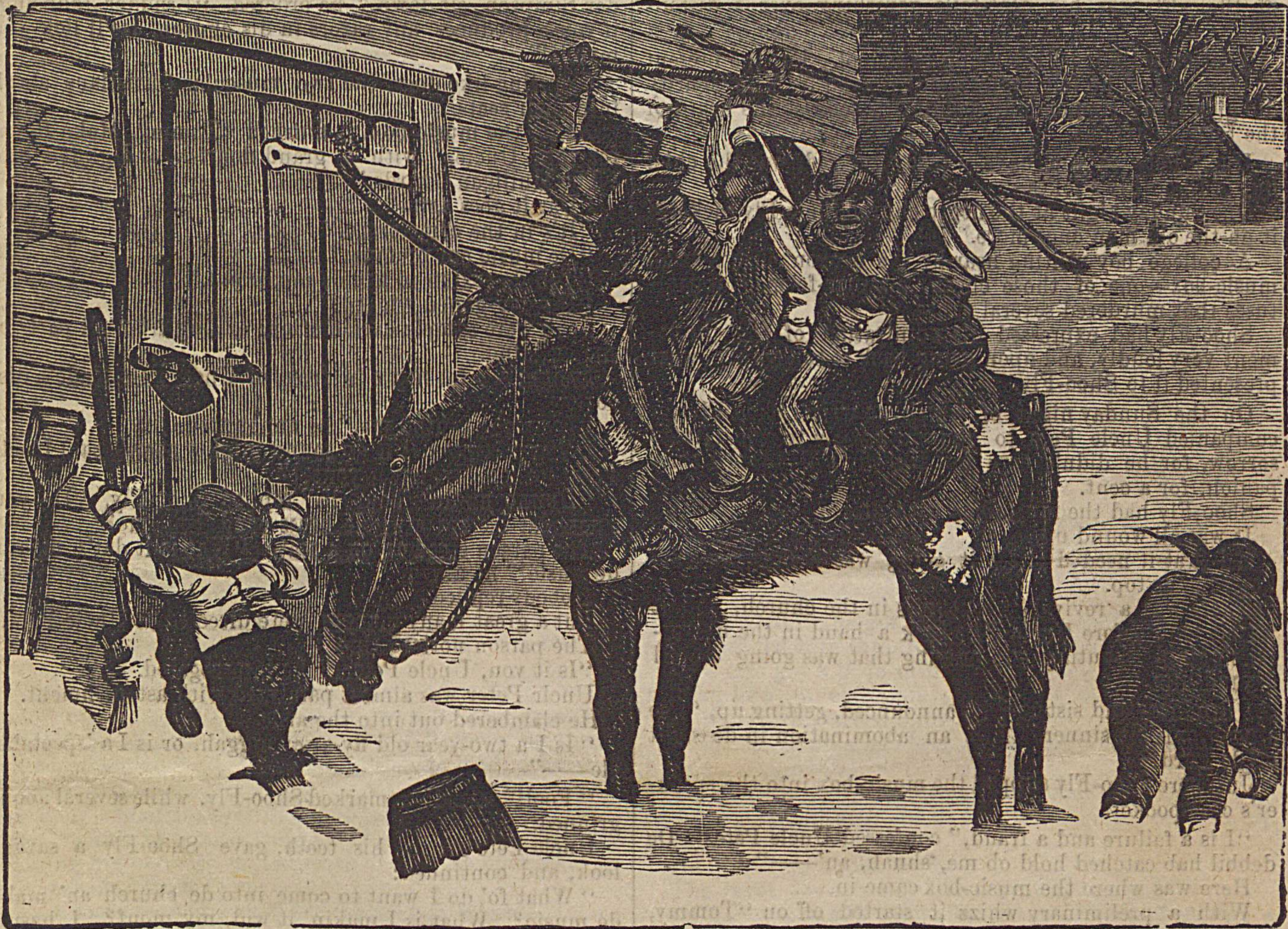
"Whoever did it, stand up."

Nobody arose.

"Mebbe it was de cat," insinuated Shoo-Fly, catching sight of a pussy prowling around the back of the room.

"Probably it was you," pointedly said Mr. Thwacker.

Shoo-Fly did not hear him. He had discovered an apple-core in a pocket of his ulster, and a red-headed boy near him with his mouth open.



"Jess youse take dat broom by de stable door, and welt de stuffin' clear out ob dis dog gone mule!" Shoo-Fly shouted. "Spects he'll go den!"

lost," interrupted Shoo-Fly; "it's big enough to find its way home alone."

"Shoo-Fly!" fairly roared Mr. Thwacker, "who is the head of this school, you or I?"

"Put it to de vote," wisely answered Shoo-Fly, with his hands in his ulster pockets, and his dunce-cap cocked nobbily over one eye.

"I'll lick you within an inch of your life if you don't keep still," thundered Mr. Thwacker.

"Kill me dead?"

"Probably."

"Dat's all right. I b'long to a social club, an' de boys will bury me free. Kin I hab a lilac bush onter my grave?"

"If you don't keep still I'll gag you," at last said Mr. Thwacker, in desperation.

Shoo-Fly perceived that he was in earnest.

And as Shoo-Fly didn't have an overwhelming desire to be gagged, he subsided for a minute, and relieved his feelings by firing spit-balls at a good boy in the back seat, much to the good boy's evident agony.

"Scholars," once more resumed Mr. Thwacker, "some

It became a matter of speculation to Shoo-Fly whether or not the boy's mouth was wide enough open to admit of the passage of the apple-core.

The more Shoo-Fly reflected upon the problem, the more did he desire to see it solved.

Taking advantage of a favorable opportunity, he slyly flung the apple-core.

Straight into the red-headed boy's mouth it went, to his thunderstruck astonishment.

He gasped and choked and kicked until his eyes bulged out of his head and his face was the color of a lobster.

The attention of the whole school was attracted to him.

"Put ice on his head—he's got fits," advised Shoo-Fly.

"He ain't," snapped a little girl; "you threw an apple-core down his throat."

"Smarty—smarty, go swaller de grammer. Ho! youse said 'frowed,' yer' orter said 'frew,'" taunted Shoo-Fly.

Just then the red-headed boy came to. He was passionate, as most red-headed boys are.

"Now, Shoo-Fly, I'm going to tell on yer," he said.

"What fo'?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"You put the torpedo on Mr. Thwacker's desk. I seed yer through the winder."

"He did?" gasped Mr. Thwacker.

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Thwacker made a dive for the ruler.

Shoo-Fly made a dive for the door.

Out of it he went like a shot, upsetting three or four who got into his way.

Mr. Thwacker pursued.

But he was not quick enough.

By the time that he got to the door all that was visible of Shoo-Fly was his coat-tails vanishing over a distant hill.

That ended Shoo-Fly's going to school. For the present at least. And he felt happy about it even if Miss Charity did give him a tremendous scolding as soon as she heard of the torpedo exploit.

Uncle Pete, as you have already guessed, was the chief but of Shoo-Fly's jokes.

One Sunday night at the negro church Shoo-Fly racketed it on the old man once more.

A college boy visiting near-by the deacon's had a small music-box—one of those cheap, circular-formed apparatuses that murdered several tunes.

Shoo-Fly had expressed his admiration of the instrument very loudly, and upon going back to college its owner presented it to Shoo-Fly.

On the Sunday night of which we write, Shoo-Fly accompanied Uncle Pete to church, greatly to the latter's sorrow, for he didn't care for Nobody's Moke as a companion, for a cent.

Shoo-Fly had the music-box with him.

It was all wound up.

All that it needed to set it going was a pressure on a knob in the top.

There was a revival in progress in the church, and it wasn't long before Uncle Pete took a hand in the universal singing, shouting and praying that was going on all around him.

"Brudders and sisters," he announced, getting up, "I'se a poah, mis'ble sinner. I is an abomination in de sight ob de Lord!"

Just here Shoo-Fly slipped the music-box into the speaker's coat-pocket.

"I is a failure and a fraud," confessed Uncle Pete. "De debbil hab catched hold ob me, shuah, an'—"

Here was where the music-box came in.

With a preliminary whizz it started off on "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle."

Uncle Pete, however, was so engrossed in his endeavor to prove himself out a glazed old humbug, that he did not hear it. He was partially deaf, anyhow.

"Oh, I is de mud beneaf a good man's feet; I is dirt in de ash-cart," he yelled.

But the rest of the congregation heard the unexpected melody.

They gazed at one another with surprise expressed on their faces.

The parson held up his hand for silence.

"Dar's music in the air!" he called out.

"Somebody's outside disturbin' ob dis congregation wid a fiddle," said a brother.

"Sh!" exclaimed another; "dat ain't no fiddle talk—it am a pianner."

"Whar you 'spect anybody's gwine to get a pianner," asked the first speaker.

"Mebbe dey bring 'long on a cart."

"I tole youse dat's a fiddle."

"It's a pianner!"

"Fiddle!"

"Pianner!"

Some niggers got 'bout as much ear fo' music as a cow. Dat's a fiddle, take my oath."

"Some niggers got wax in dere ears. Dat's a pianner."

"Who's got wax in dere ears?"

"You'se."

The two respected brothers got up in their seats, and a quarrel seemed assured.

One of them put his hand on his pistol pocket.

Several ladies screamed loudly.

"Look out, Brudder Johnsing!" shrieked a feminine voice. "He carries a razor!"

Parson Sweetoil got down out of the pulpit.

"Is dis a church or a free an' easy?" he asked. "Brud-der Simpson, sit down," he ordered. "Brud-der Johnsing, if youse produces any razors in dis church, Ise'll lick you myself!"

Growling like dogs, the two muscular Christians slunk into their seats.

As for the music box, it finished "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle," with a grand flourish, and glided into "The Mulligan Guards."

"Dar it goes agin."

"It's in the cemeterary."

"De music am profane!"

"Tell de sexton to fire de music out."

"It's dog-goned wicked!"

Such were sample exclamations arising from all parts of the building.

Instantly a fat negro in front of Uncle Pete made a discovery.

"It's right behind me," he announced.

"Pears to me dat it do sound mighty near," said Uncle Pete; "Shoo-Fly, am it youse?"

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout it," replied Shoo-Fly. "Do you s'pose dat Ise got a whole brass band 'bout me?"

The parson stood up on a seat. "Who is it dat's makin' de music?" he asked.

Nobody replied.

But a great many glances were directed at Uncle Pete.

The parson noticed this.

"Is it you, Uncle Peter?" he interrogated.

Uncle Peter was almost paralyzed with astonishment.

He clambered out into the aisle.

"Is I a two-year old fly-away niggah, or is I a 'spectable ole—"

"Fool!" casually remarked Shoo-Fly, while several about grinned.

Uncle Pete gritted his teeth, gave Shoo-Fly a savage look, and continued:

"What fo' do I want to come into de church an' make de music? What is I makin' it wid, my mouf? I hasn't done got nuffin' 'bout me dat plays a tune."

As if resolved to prove him a liar, the music-box stopped short on the "Mulligan Guard," and cavorted into "We Won't Go Home till Morning."

"De music certainly precedes from youah vicinity," said the parson.

"Kase you see a pipe in my pocket don't prove I'se smoking, do it?" Uncle Peter inquired.

"No, sah."

"De one am jess as unsensible as de other. Ise ain't no musical instrument."

"Deacon Deadhead, will you please fo' to intervestigate dis yere music?" asked the parson.

The deacon got up.

He was a solemn-looking negro, who might have been taken for a model for a gravestone.

He peered under the pulpit with owlsh gravity, examined a spittoon carefully, scrutinized the wall, and gazed with supernatural wisdom into the baptismal bowl.

He announced solemnly that the music was not there, and then moved down the aisle to Uncle Pete.

By this time the music-box had switched off into its last tune: "Johnny Morgan plays the Organ." And by the way in which the music-box rattled it off, Johnny Morgan appeared to be playing the organ with fiendish glee.

The deacon gazed carefully at Uncle Pete's feet.

"Spect dat Ise got a parlah organ concealed in my shoe?" sarcastically asked Uncle Pete.

The deacon made no reply, but examined the rest of Uncle Pete's person.

"Oh, yes, I'se got a banjo in my mouf, an' I'se playin' it wid my teefe," growled Uncle Pete, growing restive under the scrutiny. "'Pears to me dat I mote jess as well gib up bein' good an' jine de cannibals."

Without a muscle of his face moving, the cast-iron deacon dove into Uncle Pete's pocket and brought out the music box.

"Dar!" he exclaimed, holding it aloft.

A groan of horror and surprise went up from the congregation.

"Uncle Pete, I is surprised an' intensely horrified," gasped the parson. "You has come heah wid a music box, disturbed de whole ob de exercises, an' den lied 'bout it. De debbil hab cotched you fo' a fact. Uncle Pete, youse will please to git out ob de church."

"But," objected Uncle Pete, "I'se as innocent as a —"

"Dat'll do," retorted the parson, "we will heah de rest some mo' convenient season. De choir will please to sing de sebenty-sixth psalm, an' Uncle Pete will please to get out."

Sorrowfully the poor darkey did so, wondering how in the mischief the music box could have got into his possession.

"It must hab been de work ob de debbil, shuah," he mournfully concluded.

Shoo-Fly, of course, was happy over this joke for a day or two.

But he shortly after met with an adventure that was a sort of a revenge for his practical joking.

He and a select mob of the worst young darkeys in the village were out on a tramp one afternoon.

They were having a glorious time in their own estimation.

They had snowballed everybody and everything; made slides in front of all the houses in town, to the great delight of the respectable citizens who fell down on them, "hooked behind" all the passing sleighs, and otherwise enjoyed themselves.

Finally one of the crowd, the redoubtable Cotton, spied a mule which had been locked out of its stable, and was standing mutely with mulish patience by the door, waiting for some kind hand to open it.

This was a regular picnic for the colored brigade.

"Let's go ridin'," proposed Shoo-Fly.

This suggestion was instantly adopted.

The whole crowd piled onto the poor beast's back.

"G'lang dar, Rarus!" ordered Shoo-Fly.

But the mule didn't see it.

He stood as still as if he was made of stone, and did not budge.

Kickings and poundings were of no use, the mule firmly and positively refused to start.

"Git off dare, Pete, and snowball de pacer," Shoo-Fly ordered.

Pete slid off and implanted two vigorous snowballs on the animal's stern.

It was about as sensible a proceeding as attempting to sink an iron-clad with a volley of gum-drops.

The mule stood stock still.

Shoo-Fly had another happy thought. He ordered Cotton off.

"Jess youse take dat yere broom by de stable door, and welt de stuffin' clear out ob dis yere dog-gone mule!" Shoo-Fly shouted. "'Spects he'll go den."

CHAPTER V.

COTTON got down and ploughed his way through the snow until he reached the broom.

Meanwhile, Pete had favored the mule with another snowball, but the mule stood as stiff as if it hadn't any more feeling than a brick house.

"Why doan't youse take seberal days fo' to get dat broom?" asked Shoo-Fly, disgusted at the snail-like proceedings of Cotton.

"Why doan't youse get down an' git it yourself?" asked Cotton, stopping with one hand upon the broom.

"Bery good reason."

"What am it?"

"Dese yere Johnsing chillen right behind me on de mule—dey orphans. Bofe of dere parents are in de work-house."

"What ob it?"

"'Spose dat while I waz gettin' de broom de mule would start. Who'd be 'sponsible fo' de Johnsing boys? Jess youse done get dat broom in a hurry, Cotton, or I shall glide down an' make dem lyin' lips ob youse bigger dan ebber. You heah?"

Cotton evidently did hear, for he grasped the broom.

"Where shall I hit de old riddle?" he asked.

"Gib him a good welt on de rear," ordered Shoo-Fly, "an' we club de debil at the same time."

The programme was faithfully carried out.

The gang on the mule clubbed the poor beast unmercifully, and Cotton did yeoman's duty with the broom.

The mule stood it for a while. His thoughts seemed far away; roaming in the green recesses of India's jungles or in the icy caverns of the North Pole.

But at last he got aroused. An aroused mule is equal to about six boiler explosions in the amount of damage he can do.

In a minute the mule appeared to be all legs. And the air appeared to be all little darkeys. Away they went, in all directions, Shoo-Fly being fired square into the stable door.

As for Cotton, he got a kick that almost paralyzed him, and deposited him into the snow several feet under.

Pete also got a taste of mule hoof, and rose up towards the sky like an elaborate rocket, but came down again with remarkable speed onto his head.

If the stable door had been a little softer Shoo-Fly might have gone through.

As it was, he dropped down into the snow like a wounded whangdoodle, with one of the "Johnsing" boys on top of him.

He looked up at the mule.

The beast was standing like a graven image.

Its face was as sad and solemn as a sepulcher, and a thoughtful mist obscured its eyes.

Plainly its mind was with the savages of Central Turkestan, or among the vine-clad hills of sunny Italy.

Shoo-Fly got up.

He looked at the mule.

Then he felt of his head, and glanced with a puzzled expression of face at the collapsed state of the riding party.

Then he looked at the mule again, and that animal stared gravely at him, as if to mutely suggest that it didn't have the pleasure of his acquaintance, and didn't want to have.

Shoo-Fly scratched his wool. Plainly he was perplexed.

He stumbled through the snow, and pulled out the unfortunate and almost stunned Cotton.

"Wha'—wha' is he?" dazedly demanded Cotton.

"Where's who?" asked shoo-Fly.

"De man."

"What man?"

"De man dat hit me wid de club."

"Youse can't gib me no taffy," said Shoo-Fly. "What fo' did youse want to gwine fo' to do it?"

"Wha' did I do?"

"Knock us all off ob de mule wid de broom."

"Who did?"

"You did."

"Swar I didn't. Cross my heart. Wha' fo' did youse lean down an' kick me in de head fo'?"

"Didn't," protested Shoo-Fly.

Just then Pete revived, and he appeared upon the scene.

He was sure that somebody had hit him with a brick, and he began putting a head on the smallest Johnson boy on principle.

Of course Shoo-Fly took a hand in the muss, and a free fight raged, while the mule looked on with a sad protest written in its eyes.

At last, after everybody was exhausted and nobody hurt, as somehow always miraculously happens in small boys' fights, although a spectator looking on during the progress of the row would swear that, at least, all but one would get killed, Shoo-Fly proposed that they get onto the mule again.

This motion was adopted.

The whole mob clambered onto the beast's back for the second time.

The mule appeared not to have the faintest idea of what was going on.

His thoughts seemed to be roaming further off than ever. Indeed, a bystander would have been apt to take him for a wooden mule.

The clubbing started afresh.

For all practical purposes Shoo-Fly and his pals might as well have got off and clubbed a fence.

"Wondah is dis alive?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"It's stuffed," said Cotton.

"Wid bricks," solemnly added the youngest Johnsing boy.

"Wondah how we can make de ole mule go?" queried Shoo-Fly.

He got several responses.

"Build a fire under him!"

"Get out an' push!"

"Rub its nose with a carrot!"

"Get a gun and shoot it!"

"No, I tole youse how," began Shoo-Fly, a thought striking him; "we'll get a——"

Shoo-Fly never finished the sentence. It is lost to the world forever.

For just as he was about to speak, Cotton, who was astride of the tail end of the mule, discovered a sore on his mount's hindquarters.

Nothing would do but that Cotton should undertake to heal the sore by striking it with the big bale stick he held in his hand.

That was too much for the composure of the mule.

He put down his head and raised his feet. He did more high kicking in a second than any song and dance man ever did in a week.

All of the darkeys flew in different directions except Shoo-Fly.

By some miracle he stuck on.

"Whoa!" he bawled.

The mule brayed stentoriously, kicked ferociously, and tried to bite Shoo-Fly's feet off.

"Help fo' de Lawd's sakes, I'se a gone niggah!" Shoo-Fly screeched.

"Oh—oh! look at de circus," called out Cotton, revived by Shoo-Fly's cries.

"Kill de mule," begged Shoo-Fly. "I'se dyin'."

"Jump," advised Cotton.

"Catch hold ob de tail."

"What fo'?"

"Den he'll stop prancing aroun' an' gib me a chance to get off. Whoa da, you fo' legged debil!"

Cotton arose.

He made a desperate clutch for the mule's tail and secured it.

The mule grinned a fiendish grin and elevated both hind legs.

Cotton shot up into the air as if he had been propelled from a cannon.

"Dat's de berry las' time I done take hold ob a mule's tail when de mule am alive," he sorrowfully gasped, as he landed over into an adjoining field with a sea-sick feeling at his stomach.

Meanwhile the mule had succeeded in finally shaking Shoo-Fly off.

Having done so, it relapsed into its old condition of quiet.

It stood as quiet as a statue, and once more its spirit apparently was with the Kaffirs at Cape Colony, or the tall-eating Esquimaux,

Sadly Shoo-Fly collected his crowd together again.

"Boys," said he, "de nex' time that you go ridin', take an earthquake fo' a hoss befo' youse tackle a mule. Dis gang would do fust class to start a hospital wid."

They looked so.

Cotton had a black eye, and a blood-dyed nose, and his stomach had a strong look of gone-ness about it.

Pete was all broke up in every way, and didn't seem to have spirit enough left to snowball a drunken man.

The two Johnsing boys were bruised in all parts, and were a sick brace of orphans. As for Shoo-Fly, with his usual good luck, he wasn't hurt much—but he was sore.

The mule was the only one who had come out of the battle without a scar.

It was untouched.

Sorrowfully the crowd went home.

But the story of the mule ride got wind.

The street boys taunted Shoo-Fly with pointed allusions to mules and mule-back rides generally, and Shoo-Fly fought about half the village, on that account, inside of a week.

About this time Shoo-Fly played another joke on poor Uncle Pete that deserves recording.

Uncle Pete was no slouch of a bragger.

He had a great propensity for yarning about his personal prowess in a way that would have done credit to some old fore-castle salt.

One night he sat in the kitchen reading the county paper.

"'Nother man stopped by tramps," he said, with a sniff.

"Who tole youse?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"In de paper."

"What paper? Paper of tobacker?"

"Youse are just as fresh as a three yeahs' ole colt," said Uncle Pete, with dignity. "'Spect dat I can't read?"

"In words ob one syllable, dat's all."

Uncle Pete responded by throwing the cat at Shoo-Fly, and said, with great dignity:

"Folks are all cowards now."

"'Cos dey 'sociate wid youse," slyly put in Shoo-Fly.

"Youse mean to say dat I'se a coward?"

"Is youse?"

"No, sah, I was all frew de war."

"In de sutler's wagon?"

"I fote in sebenty-five battles."

"Fote 'skeeters?"

"I was mos' killed at de battle ob Sebenteen Oaks."

"Dat was a pity."

"Ob course."

"Pity dat dey didn't kill youse all," finished up Shoo-Fly. "What are youse gibbin' me, Uncle Pete—lasses on a bean-pole?"

"I'se whistlin' truthfully, chile. I was on General Sigel's cane."

"On his staff, youse mean."

"All de same. I fote wid Sigel. Done tole youse what, de tramps better not tackle me."

"Why?"

"'Cause I'se red blood bad. I'se wicked, Shoo-Fly, when I'se gets real mad. Git reckless."

"G'way."

"Fact. Chew ear off. Oh, I'se a hot ole liquorish drop to pick up in a fight. 'Spects dat it would take mos' eight burglars fo' to skeer me."

"Oh, gib me de rest wid water in," growled Shoo-Fly, bent on provoking the old man. "Do youse know who youse kin fight?"

"Anybody."

"No, sah. All youse kin fight is consumptives, women, an' chillen under ten yeahs ole. Half of a good healthy tramp would skeer de wool clear off of dat ole head ob youse."

"Fust ting youse know I'll cober dat mouf ob youse wif my foot," expressed Uncle Pete.

"I'se only joking," apologized Shoo-Fly. "Say, Uncle Pete."

"I'se listenin'."

"'Spouse dat a robber would come into your house—what would youse do?"

"One robbah?"

"Yes, a lone hand."

Uncle Pete went through an original pantomime, designed to express shooting, stabbing, clubbing, and body-demolishing generally.

"I'd hurt him," he said.

"Hurt him?"

"Yes, chile."

"Hurt him bad?"

"Dere would be a dead body 'roun' in de mornin', an' it wouldn't be me," gently insinuated Uncle Pete. "Dat's all, chile," and Uncle Pete wound up the kitchen clock, raked down the fire, picked up his lantern, and started off to his little cabin.

Shoo-Fly sat and thought for a moment.

"Dat ole fool orter get a gold medal wid pink tassels onto it fo' lyin'," he reflected. "Dat's a nice ole image fo' a brave man. Shoo! a flea wid de lung fever could frow him in a wrestle! Wondah what he would do if a robber did get into his house?"

Shoo-Fly thought a little longer.

"Wondah what sort of a robber I would make?" he conjectured.

An old slouch hat of the deacon's hung onto the wall.

He put it on.

A dilapidated cloak, Miss Charity's property, was suspended over a chair.

He donned it.

Then he tore the cover off of one of his thrown-aside school-books, punched holes in it with a knife, and by the exercise of a little ingenuity, succeeded in completing quite a respectable looking mask.

He tied that about his head, and peered into the big looking-glass.

It was a great transformation. He hardly knew himself.

"Golly, Ise a tough-looking nigger," he chuckled, in delight. "Looks as if I fed on ram beef all ob de yeah. Bet I'd skeer de beef out ob Uncle Pete."

The last sentence contained a new inspiration.

He resolved to play robber.

To go down to Uncle Pete's board palace and put that worthy darkey's vaunted courage to the test.

"But I wants a weapon," he reflected. "Gib me a pistol."

A pistol, however, was not to be obtained.

They didn't grow about the kitchen.

There was only one thing that he could secure.

That was a carving knife.

A big-bladed carving knife, with a bone handle, that looked sufficiently ferocious to be the property of a practical pirate.

Shoo-Fly grabbed it.

"Get away dar, Leander," he cried, disemboweling a score of imaginary opponents. "I is Liver Lips McPuff, de Corsair Moke ob de Black Hills! Dis style in a picter, six for ten dollars--in gilt frames!"

Satisfied with his robber-like appearance he started for Uncle Pete's.

He took a cautious survey of the house.

No light was visible.

All was calm and dark.

Uncle Pete had evidently got into bed without any unnecessary waste of time.

Shoo-Fly undid a shutter, for Uncle Pete, confident that he was safe from the intrusion of suspicious characters, did not take particular pains to render his dwelling unenterable.

He peeped in.

Uncle Pete was abed.

He listened.

A snore about as musical as the wail of a pig in a poke greeted his ears.

Uncle Pete was wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

Shoo-Fly wrapped at the window.

"I'll wake up de ole runt afo' de circus begins," he said.

Uncle Pete heard the rap.

He started up.

"Wundah what dat is?" he thought. "Mebbe de ole stove in de kitchen hab done bust up."

Rap—rap! went Shoo-Fly's fist against the window panes.

Uncle Pete saw from what direction the noise was coming.

"Bet dat some ob dem Spanish chickens is a tryin' fo' to fly in at de windah," he said.

He turned his eyes windowward. Just then the moon emerged from behind a cloud and flooded the outside with her silver rays.

There was Shoo-Fly standing outside of the window in a particularly ferocious attitude, with his carving knife pointing grimly at Uncle Pete.

"Ber-lud!" yelled Shoo-Fly, with a frantic wave of the carving knife.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE PETE trembled like a leaf.

He gazed fearfully at the apparition outside of the window.

"De Lawd save us!" he uttered, with chattering teeth, as he dove his head beneath the bedclothes. "What am it?"

Shoo-Fly raised the window and stepped into the room.

Uncle Pete popped his head out of the quilt.

"G'way—g'way!" he cried. "I dunno you. What de debil do youse want?"

"Get out ob dat yere bed!" ordered Shoo-Fly.

"Wha' fo'?"

"Don't ax. Get out ob dat yere bed, or Ise'll cut yer libber out!"

This awful threat fairly paralyzed Uncle Pete.

He saw the flash of the gleaming carving-knife as it glittered in the moonlight, and visions of a select negro funeral filled his brain.

He got up.

"Lively, dar!" Shoo-Fly urged. "Don't take all night, kase I'se got to go kill seberal mo' men to-night!"

Uncle Pete shivered again.

This was a most bloodthirsty visitor; evidently a killer from Cow Bay.

"What's Ise got to arise fo'?" he tremblingly asked.

"Fo' example. Dance."

"Do what?" gasped Uncle Pete, his eyes bulging out.

"Dance," repeated Shoo-Fly. "Gib us a can-can. Go in fo' de beer. Tum-te-tum-te-tummity-tum. Put in de skylight touches, old man."

"But I'se kain't dance; I'se got de rheumatiz."

"Gib it away. Dance, youse ole black skelington, or I'se'll hab youse ears. Dey'll look nice to hab in de parlah when de minister comes aroun'."

Uncle Pete gave vent to a long-drawn-out sob, and commenced a sort of dance.

It resembled the Terpsichorean exercise of a ghoulish on a tombstone.

"Dis yeah ain't a funeral," disgustedly said Shoo-Fly. "Gib it to us hotter."

Poor Uncle Pete had to comply. The carving-knife looked as if it was thirsting for his blood.

Shoo-Fly thought that he would die a laughing to witness the corpse-like break-down of the old man.

"Dat'll do," he said, finally.

Uncle Pete stopped.

"Kin I go back to bed," he called.

"No, sah."

"Why not?"

"I wants somepin'."

"What am it?"

"Blood."

"Oh, Lawd!" groaned Uncle Pete. "Take de sofa."

"No, sah," answered Shoo-Fly, drawing the blade of the carving-knife over his thumb-nail. "Nuffin' will do but blood!"

"Take de bureau!" wailed Uncle Pete.

"No, sah, don't want de bureau. Nuffin' but blood—blood in a bucket!"

"Take de clock."

"Neber. Blood—blood—blood! Blood in de moon!" and Shoo-Fly went through some Indian club exercises with the carving-knife that sent Uncle Pete into a fit of fright.

"Oh, dear, good robber," he entreated, getting down on his knees.

"Spare my life, fo' de sake ob my wife," lied the black falsifier.

"Hab youse a wife?" Shoo-Fly asked.

"Seberal!"

"Any kids?"

"Forty-lebben-forty-four."

"Den I will spare your life. But I must hab blood!"

"Kill a cow."

"Human blood."

"Go up to de big house an' kill dat yer Shoo-Fly," suggested Uncle Pete, struck with a happy thought. "If youse'll only kill dat young debbil de whole town will gib youse a gold medal, shuah."

"Mebbe I will," promised Shoo-Fly. "Gib me your watch."

The watch to which he alluded was lying on the table.

It was a boss watch.

One of those fairy arrangements about the size of a cheese, and not much heavier than a small safe.

It never made the faintest pretence to keep time, but for all that it was a watch.

And as such was Uncle Pete's pleasure and pride.

"Don't take it," he begged. "It was gib to me by ole massa."

"Ole massa who?"

"General Washin'ton."

"General Mud," sneered Shoo-Fly. "Did he gib youse de watch?"

"Fo' Moses."

"Den I is Gen'ral Washin'ton's darter. De watch are mine."

Uncle Pete started forward as if with a desperate intention of securing his pet property.

But a vicious forward thrust of the carving-knife sent him back again.

Shoo-Fly glanced about.

Quietly reposing in a tumbler of water was Uncle Pete's greatest pet, his set of false teeth.

Shoo-Fly grabbed them.

Uncle Pete uttered a piteous wail.

"Luff go of dem!" he shouted.

"Ah, base infidel," roared Shoo-Fly. "Who's youse talkin' to."

"Please leave de teefe."

"What fo'?"

"How is I to eat?"

"Don't eat?"

"But I'se can't chew meat."

"Chew gum-drops. Dese ere teefe am too good fo' youse. 'Spect dat youse better get wooden ones."

"Take anything else in de house, eben de roof," begged Pete. "Whar is I to get a new set?"

"Dig in the back yard fo' dem. Good-by."

"Oh!" pleaded Uncle Pete, the tears coming into his eyes. "I's gib yer all de money dat I hab in de house fo' dem teefe."

"Dar ain't no good talkin'," firmly asserted Shoo-Fly. "Dese yere grub-chewers are mine. Is'e gwine tooth ker-lectin'; gwine to build a pagoda wid dem."

"A who?" queried Uncle Pete.

"A pagoda."

"Who's dat?"

"Bite it an' see. Good-night," and out slipped Shoo-Fly through the window, with the teeth and the watch.

Next morning Uncle Pete was down to the house at break of day.

"Massa Hoyt—Massa Hoyt!" he called out to the deacon.

"Well, what is it?" sleepily asked the deacon, as he came out of the house, rubbing his eyes.

"I'se been robbed."

"Robbed?"

"Deedy I have. Oh, I'se a poah, no account niggah got no fren's."

Just then Shoo-Fly arrived.

"Whose gibbin' us taffy 'bout being robbed?" he asked.

"Me," responded Uncle Pete.

"Youse been robbed?"

"Shuah!"

"Who did it?"

"Dar was six ob dem," asserted Uncle Pete.

"Six?" echoed the deacon.

"Yes, sah, six ob de biggest debils dat eber you seed. Dey was armed to de neck wid pistols an' guns, an' spears an' swords an' knives."

"Funny dat sich a very reckless gang could be aroun' heah and nobody see dem," commented Shoo-Fly.

"Oh, I'se a tootin' my whistle truefully," replied Uncle Pete.

"How were they dressed?" asked the deacon.

"Dey had long cloaks on an' black masks."

"I'd a thought dat you'd a licked dem," said Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete swelled up in conscious pride.

"See dat hand?" he asked, extending one black paw.

"Dat's de wuss hand I ebber saw," criticised Shoo-Fly.

"Looks jess like a ham cut in two, an' de wuss piece left."

"Dat hand," said Uncle Pete, solemnly, "were colored wid blood!"

"Did youse slug dem?"

"Do what?"

"Slug dem."

"Chile," said Uncle Pete, "slugging was not de expression. Did youse ebber see a cow step into a lot ob bull-frogs. De cow was me, an' de bull-frogs was de robbers. I jess grasped de bureau."

"De what?"

"De bureau. Git me excited an' I'se iron, chile—an' I went fo' de crowd. Dere were eight ob dem."

"You said six befo'."

"Dar were two more outside ob de house dat I didn't count. Well, as I said, I clutched de washstand—"

"Youse said bureau."

"I had dem bofe—one in each han', an' I started. Tole youse what, 'twasn't free minutes afo' I had all ob de nine on de floah!"

"Nine what?"

"Robbers, you little fool! 'Spect dat I'se talking 'bout horse-flies?"

"Dere was only eight robbers jess befo', youse said."

"I foun' de oder one hid in de chimley. Who's done telling dis narrative, you or me?"

"You," answered Shoo-Fly.

"Well, Uncle Pete," put in the deacon, "did you get robbed of anything?"

"I should done blush, massa."

"Of what?"

"De best I had!"

"Your tin bank?"

"Wuss dan dat!"

"Your clothes?"

"Wusser!"

"Your teeth?"

"Dat's it—dat's it," moaned Uncle Pete. "How is I to be a 'spectable member ob society widout any teefe? Nice ole chromo I will be fo' a church fair."

"But what in the world possessed them to take only your teeth?"

"Debiltry, I suppose. But dey took sumpin' else."

"What?"

"My watch."

"Those robbers must be curiosities," laughed the deacon; "eight of them."

"Nine," corrected Uncle Pete.

"Nine, then. Nine of them to break into your house, and steal only a set of false teeth, and an old brass watch that isn't worth two cents."

"Play light, sah, play light on de reppelations ob dat watch," asked Uncle Pete. "It was de intrinsic merit ob that watch, not de momentary value that rendered it ob great worth. Dar ain't another watch like it in de country."

"Owing to a merciful Providence"—repeated Shoo-Fly, from his Sunday-school lesson.

All that day Uncle Pete told April fool stories about his robbery.

The number of robbers gradually increased.

At last they got to be nearly seventy.

Uncle Pete even told Miss Charity that he thought that they had a cannon with them.

"If it hadn't been dat I braced right up to dem dere would hab been a dead nigger on ice 'round dis heah vicinity dis mauning," he said. "Golly, youse oughter hab seed me lay dem out."

At last Shoo-Fly got sick of hearing the bragging lies of the old man.

He determined to expose the whole racket, and get a grand laugh on the ancient Munchausen.

That night, as usual, the whole of the deacon's family were clustered about the cosy sitting-room.

The deacon was reading the county paper, Miss Charity was sewing, Uncle Pete was mending a whip-lash, and Shoo-Fly was sitting on a stool by the fire, playing with his parrot, and endeavoring to learn that ignorant and utterly depraved bird his "A. B. C's."

"It is remarkable, Peter," observed the deacon, "that nobody saw, or heard, or knew anything about your robbers. I have made inquiries all around the village to-day. Where did they go?"

"Mebbe dey rode away on horses," hazarded Uncle Pete, stopping in his work.

"Dey didn't do nuffin ob de sort," contradicted Shoo-Fly.

"Some penny niggahs have shillin' moufs," sneered Uncle Pete. "What do youse know 'bout it?"

"Lots."

"G'way."

"It's so. In de fust place, dem wasn't any robbers."

"Course not. 'Spect dat I dreamed it," sarcastically said Uncle Pete. "I got up in de night an' stole my own teefe, didn't I?"

"Noap."

"Mebbe it was de parrot."

"Noap. What will youse gib me if I tole youse?"

The deacon put down his pipe, and Miss Charity neglected her sewing. Uncle Pete stopped short in his operation, and let the unfinished whip-lash fall to the floor. Even the parrot assumed a listening attitude on Shoo-Fly's knee.

"You mean to say dat you know who was de culprits?" asked Uncle Pete.

"Shuah," answered Shoo-Fly.

"Youse crazy."

"Nebber. What'll youse gib me if I tole youse?"

"Ten cents."

"Shoo! youse too liberal."

"Fifteen."

"Raise de rate."

"Twenty."

"Dat's a terrible lot of gold, ain't it? Dose teefe are worfe ten dollars to youse."

"Twenty-five; dat's a lot of money, chile. But youse ain't gibing me no sleigh ride?"

"Not much; put de reward up higher an' Ise'll gib de robbers away."

"All right."

"Whar's de money?"

"Gib it to you bime-by."

"No, sah," answered Shoo-Fly. "Dis yeah transaction am C.I.A.—Cash in advance."

Uncle Pete felt in his pockets. After diligent search, and a thorough ransacking of his garments, he raked up two battered quarters.

He handed them over to Shoo-Fly. Nobody's Moke took them, bit them to ascertain their genuineness, and then put them carefully away in his shoe.

"Now I'll tole youse who de bugglars was!" he said.

"Who?" asked Uncle Pete, while the deacon and Miss Charity both bent forward expectantly.

"Dey was me."

"You!"

"Shuah as preachin'."

"Put de chile to bed wid ice on de head," compassionately remarked Uncle Pete. "He hab done gone crazy!"

"Youse a liar, is I," complacently replied Shoo-Fly, as he proceeded to give the whole racket away.

At first his listeners were incredulous.

"Isn't that a sort of fairy tale, Shoo-Fly?" the deacon queried.

"Dat's de mos' remarkable romance dat I ebber heard," contemptuously commented Uncle Pete.

"I kin prove it," said Shoo-Fly.

"How?"

"Wait fo' a year or two till I returns wid de vouchers."

Shoo-Fly went to his own little room above the kitchen.

He returned very soon.

In his hand he held a small newspaper bundle.

"What hab youse got in dere?" asked Uncle Pete.

Shoo-Fly grinned.

A grin of conscious superiority.

He slowly unrolled the bundle.

"Look at dere!" he said.

Uncle Pete craned his neck forward and gazed at the articles in Shoo-Fly's hands.

"Dat's my teefe an' my watch, shuah as I is a sinful niggah," he faintly exclaimed.

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